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Abstract

Studying gender-based violence (GBV) in country-specific parliamentary discourses can provide legislative perspectives and global understanding of the experience of GBV and the fight against it. In Ghana, for instance, men are mostly seen as the default perpetrators of GBV, even though research shows that men also suffer from GBV. Thus, using a corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) approach, this study investigates the discursive construction of GBV in parliamentary debates in Ghana, a leading democracy in West Africa. The study uses parliamentary debates as primary data and legislation on domestic violence and other related instruments as secondary data. Through concordances and collocation, we identify and examine how GBV is constructed in the parliamentary debates and how such GBV constructions relate to the expression of domestic violence in legislation. The study shows that the discourse around GBV centres on three main issues, namely: the forms of GBV, victims and perpetrators of GBV, and the fight against it. The analysis indicates that when MPs talk about GBV, they refer predominantly to violence against women and children, including domestic violence, wife beating, sexual violence, defilement, rape, physical assault, teenage pregnancy, child prostitution, child marriage and violence against women in politics; they are silent on violence against men. The MPs think that collective activism, education, achieving gender parity and a strong legal regime that severely punishes offenders are critical antidotes to GBV.¹

Key words: *gender-based violence, domestic violence, discursive construction, Ghanaian parliamentary debates, legislation, social psychology*

1. Introduction

The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (cf. Klugman, 2017) and The United Nations 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (cf. Morrison et al., 2007) ignited global interests in the fight against gender-based violence (GBV), which has been characterised as a global health and development issue (Bradley, 2020; Cannon et al., 2020; Klugman, 2017; Russo & Pirlott, 2006). Research indicates that today one in three women faces violence in her lifetime (Klugman, 2017). The UN sustainable development goals² include gender equality aimed at the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence (GBV), especially violence against women and girls (Bradley, 2020). GBV can be defined as ‘any act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women [or men], including threats of such

acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life' (Russo & Pirlott, 2006, p. 181). According to Heise et al. (2002, p. 6):

Gender-based violence includes a host of harmful behaviors that are directed at women and girls because of their sex, including wife abuse, sexual assault, dowry-related murder, marital rape, selective malnourishment of female children, forced prostitution, female genital mutilation, and sexual abuse of female children. Specifically, violence against women includes any act of verbal or physical force, coercion or life-threatening deprivation, directed at an individual woman or girl that causes physical or psychological harm, humiliation or arbitrary deprivation of liberty and that perpetuates female subordination.

This description encompasses social, physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence (cf. Ghana Statistical Services, 2016). Thus, GBV studies have looked at issues such as domestic violence (cf. Dickson et al., 2020; Osei-Tutu, 2017); sexual and intimate partner violence (Jewkes, 2002; Sedziafa et al., 2018; Tenkorang, 2018; World Health Organization, 2013), and the percentage of women who have experienced violence (70% according to Klugman, 2017). Generally, GBV may occur at the individual, family, community and societal levels (Heise et al., 2002).

A systematic review of research on GBV (Stöckl et al., 2013) and official reports indicate that GBV constitutes a serious human rights violation against women and girls (e.g. Council of Europe, 2011; United Nations, 2012; World Health Organisation, 2013). There is evidence that a global momentum for change is building to help end the global scourge of GBV while governments are being urged to take 'concrete actions to prevent the abuse too often experienced by half the world's population' (Anon., 2013, p. 2135). Several countries around the globe have enacted laws that criminalise GBV as a human rights violation (cf. Issahaku, 2016; Klugman, 2017). The potency and effectiveness of these laws will depend on how the discourse is interpreted and applied, yet so far there has been little research on legislator's attitudes and behaviours (cf. Formato, 2014; Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019; Orts, 2019; Sanchez-Moya, 2017; Sensales et al., 2017)

In the context of the social, political and legislative construction of shared values, an analysis of Ghanaian parliamentary debates on GBV is appropriate as it mediates between the social world and legislation. As Lombard puts it, '[g]ender is constructed discursively through language and performances and institutionally through people's positioning of their own identities in relation to social and cultural structures' (2013, p. 179). Corpus-assisted research was applied to reveal cultural conventions and relations between parliamentary attitudes to GBV and legislation. GBV in parliamentary discourse has been studied by scholars, e.g., Formato (2014, 2019), but not much research has been done to include the local and regional representativeness of the results of these studies that could provide a critical socio-psychological perspective on GBV (Sensales et al., 2017). Furthermore, GBV studies focus mainly on violence against women, whereas violence against men is underrepresented, understandably as a result of the fact that GBV affects women more significantly than men (cf. Benewaa, 2020; Kumar, 2012). However, we believe that by including GBV against men relative to GBV against women will engender a more comprehensive understanding of GBV, particularly since

men have started reporting violence against them by their partners, making it a political issue (ABC News, 2019; Emmanuel, 2015; Kumar, 2012).

With a focus on Ghanaian MPs' debates (2012-2020), which are held in the English language, this study employs a corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) approach, i.e., a (critical) discourse analysis approach that incorporates corpus linguistic techniques into the analysis as and when appropriate (cf. Baker & Levon, 2015; Partington, 2003, 2010; Partington et al., 2013), to study the GBV discourse of Ghanaian MPs in order to get a better understanding of legislative constructions of GBV, including the positioning of men vis-à-vis GBV. Since the Ghanaian parliament is male-dominated, examining the positioning of men in relation to GBV is important to unravel the posture of MPs towards GBV against both women and men. The paper is informed by the following questions:

- i. What are the forms of GBV as noted by Ghanaian parliamentarians?
- ii. How is GBV broached in Ghanaian parliamentary debates?
- iii. What measures do parliamentarians suggest in reaction to GBV?

To contextualise the study, section 2 discusses the context of GBV on an international and national level. Section 3 discusses the methodological approach. Sections 4 and 5 are devoted to the analysis and discussion of the results respectively, while section 6 evaluates the results in terms of the types of GBV, attitudes and proposed measures suggested by Ghanaian MPs that inform legislation.

2. Background

Gender-based violence (GBV) has been a concern for the international community, especially the United Nations (United Nations, 2012), and governments around the world are making great efforts to eliminate the phenomenon. The World Health Organisation (WHO) regards GBV as a human rights issue leading to countries around the world enacting GBV legislation (cf. Issahaku, 2016). For instance, Ghana's Parliament passed a Domestic Violence Law (Act 732)³ in 2007 and this was followed by the formulation of the National Policy and Plan of Action (NPPOA) developed by the former Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs in 2008, as well as the Domestic Violence Regulation of 2016 (see Ghana Statistical Services, 2016). Also, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU), formerly known as Women and Juvenile Unit (WAJU), of the Ghana Police Service was established in 1998 to help prevent and provide support and protection for victims of domestic abuse, including the arrest and prosecution of offenders, by collaborating with stakeholders (ABC News, 2019; Ghana Police Service, n.d.).

To succeed in effectively reducing or eliminating GBV, national and cultural differences in the experience of GBV need to be acknowledged, because 'there is much emerging evidence on the magnitude of gender-based violence, [but] only a small subset of this evidence is comparable across countries' (Morrison et al., 2007, p. 25). In functioning democracies, an important institution that has implications for international and global perspectives of social problems,

including GBV, is Parliament. Thus, studying GBV in country-specific parliamentary discourse provides insight into the perspectives of legislation and the locally conventional understanding of the experience of GBV. Especially in politics, 'language does not just passively reflect a pre-existing social reality [but] is an active agent in constructing that reality' (Christie, 2002, p. 16). The language of parliamentarians does not only reflect social structures and practices, but also creates them, for social structures do not only determine discourse, but they are also a product of discourse, i.e., they are socially constitutive (Fairclough, 1989). Thus, understanding the language of MPs is crucial for appreciating the social problems it reflects, upholds and which it can change.

The literature and official reports (see Jones, 2018; UNFPA, 2020; World Health Organization, 2013) focus on violence against women, which indicates that the various explanations of GBV appear to ignore violence against men. According to Lombard (2013), the perceived exclusion of men in the GBV discourse is due to the definitions of GBV that 'position violence within a gendered model of understanding that illustrates why women are predominantly "victims" and men perpetrators' (p. 177). The delineations presume that GBV is perpetrated only by men against women. While it is thought that domestic violence against men is rare (Dienye & Gbeneol, 2009), Kumar (2012) observes that '[r]esearch in the field of domestic violence has shown that men and women act violently in relationships at about the same rate' (p. 291). Considering the rate of reporting GBV, it is clear that women are more likely than men to report abuse, although, more recently, men have also reported violence against them by their female partners in different parts of the world, including Ghana (ABC News, 2019; Emmanuel, 2015; Kumar, 2012). The differences in the common notions of 'perpetrators' and 'victims' of GBV draw attention to the cultural differences in what is considered GBV.

In many countries in Africa, GBV, and particularly domestic violence, appears acceptable (Osei-Tutu, 2017). According to Dickson et al. (2020), the 2014 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey indicates that GBV is socially accepted, even among women. This is quite striking considering that Ghana's Domestic Violence Act was already passed in 2007, and the National Policy and Plan of Action (NPPOA) was operationalized in 2008. Despite these legislative measures, in comparison, GBV remains alarmingly high in Ghana (cf. Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2015; Dery & Diedong, 2014). In November 2020, a coalition of advocacy groups mounted pressure on the government of Ghana 'to implement the Domestic Violence Act and related legislation and [to] create sexual harassment policies in schools and workplaces in Ghana' (The Pearl Safe Haven, 2020). The Parliament of Ghana has had several occasions such as the annual International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women to talk about and demonstrate the commitment of Parliament towards the fight against GBV. In spite of the legislative role of Parliament in the fight against GBV, the discourse of MPs around the phenomenon has been hardly studied to understand MPs' psychosocial understanding of GBV, hence this study. The next section discusses the research design in the light of gender-based discourse studies, the data selection and the approach adopted for the Ghanaian case.

3. Methodology

A variety of methodological and theoretical approaches have been applied to study GBV, both qualitatively and/or quantitatively, including Conflict Tactics Scale, postmodern perspectives emphasising socially constructed meanings, using interviews and surveys, often using country specific populations and demographic data (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). Other approaches which include social change and ecological variations to gender-based studies have also been employed (cf. Mantey, 2019; Oduro et al., 2012). Most studies on GBV have concentrated on the experiences of women at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum (cf. Bradley, 2020; Dery & Diedong, 2014; Sedziafa et al., 2018; Tenkorang, 2018). While documentation of such lower-level experiences is important for understanding the causes and attitudes of perpetrators and victims, it does not offer us an understanding of the attitudes of power brokers who influence legislation. Gender-based studies have largely been carried out from sociological perspectives, without corresponding attention to ‘corpus-based studies of political discourse centred on the analysis of linguistic mechanisms that might be affected by gender differences’ (Álvarez-Benito & Fuentes-Rodríguez, 2016, p. 1). A study of the parliamentary discourse on GBV in Ghana complements the sociological approaches in that it reveals the discursive construction in which values and laws are legitimised. This study employs a corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) approach to investigate the discursive representations of GBV in Ghanaian parliamentary discourse (cf. Partington, 2003, 2010; Partington et al., 2013). In other words, it draws ‘on techniques developed within corpus linguistics, such as the analysis of word frequency lists and concordances’ and ‘seeks to identify regular discursive patterns that characterize particular corpora of texts, and interprets their significance using tools developed within discourse studies’ (Zhang & Mihelj, 2012, p. 510).

The parliamentary Hansards provided the most significant one-stop context for the provision of data on policy, legislative and discursive perspectives on gender and GBV in Ghana. These data cover a period of nine years (2012-2020), obtained from the Ghanaian parliamentary website (<https://www.parliament.gh>). The data amount to a corpus size of 11,480,404 tokens (running words)⁴. To make the data computer-readable and suitable for possible manipulation, we processed and converted all the Hansards into text files (cf. McEnery et al., 2006). It must be noted that the Ghanaian parliamentary debates were in English as Ghana is an English-as-a-Second Language country: English is used for all official purposes in Ghana. The parliamentary Hansards were supported with legislation on domestic violence and other related instruments as secondary data, for example, the Domestic Violence Act, 2007.

Using Scott’s (2012) *Wordsmith Tools* (version 6), we employed: (1) *concordancer*, i.e., ‘a collector and collator of examples’ of instances of the use of a search term ‘with a certain amount of co-text for each one’ (Partington, 2003, p. 2); and (2) *collocation*, i.e. co-occurrence patterns of words observed in corpus data (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). Allowing us to view discourse ‘vertically’, the concordancer helps reveal otherwise unsuspected patterns of regular usage (Partington, 2018). For concordances we used the key word *violence*, which returned 431 hits. All instances of the use of *violence* that did not indicate gender-based violence (GBV) were removed, leaving 131 instances

on which the analysis was based. Having only 131 instances of the mentions of GBV in a dataset of more than 11 million running words spanning nine (9) years of parliamentary debates indicates how seldom the phenomenon of GBV finds expression in Ghanaian parliamentary debates. This gives all the more reason why the current study is important to support a qualitative analysis to investigate the discursive construction of GBV. The application of the CADS approach allowed us to shift between corpus-internal data (i.e., description/textual analysis and/or interpretation) and corpus-external data (i.e., explanation or the wider historical, political, mediated context, and more immediate local contexts) (Partington, 2003). In other words, to be able to interpret the material extracted from the corpus, we needed to consider both the corpus itself and the socio-political context of the corpus, which included published academic research, media reports and socio-political commentaries on GBV.

4. Analysis

The purpose of this section is to examine how MPs discursively construct GBV, using the 131 relevant strings extracted from the corpus. The section is structured into two parts, namely: sketching and defining GBV and forms of GBV.

4.1 Sketching and Defining Gender-based Violence

By examining the relevant 131 collocates of the word *violence* that indicate *gender-based violence*, this section explores how Ghanaian parliamentarians (MPs) discursively construct GBV. We examine the patterns of the collocates of GBV in order to uncover how MPs construct GBV. We are interested in the most striking collocates that are characteristic of GBV. Baker et al. (2013) note that identifying the collocates can help to reveal ideological uses of language. Thus, the collocates can help to thematically sketch a search word. Figure 1 below displays the 25 most prominent patterns of collocates that define GBV.

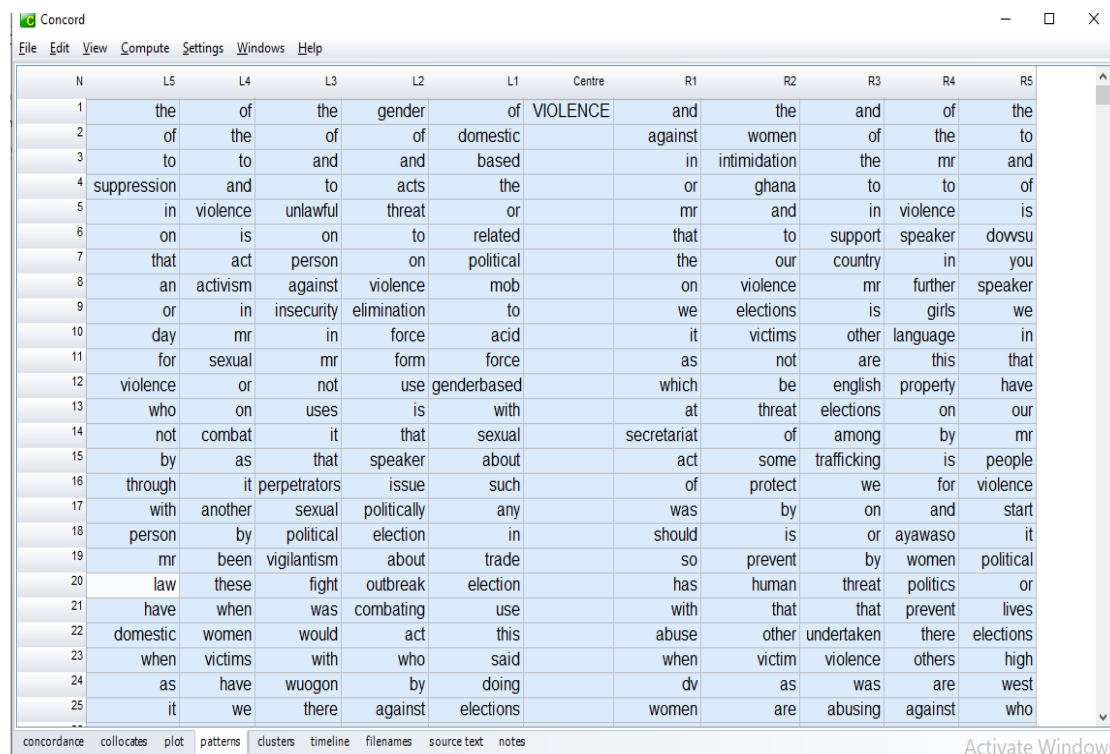


Figure 1. First 25 patterns of the collocates of *gender-based violence*

The words to the left (L1-L5) of VIOLENCE (centre) are the left collocates, while those to the right (R1-R5) are the right collocates. The span of five words on either side of *violence* was used because, while there is no ‘standard’ span of collocates within corpus linguistics circles, Baker, et al. (2013, p. 36) note that the five word span ‘offer[s] a good balance between identifying words that actually do have a relationship with each other (longer spans can throw up unrelated cases) and giving enough words to analyse (shorter spans result in fewer collocates)’.

For our purpose, the most salient collocates in Figure 1 are listed in Table 1.

Position	Collocates and their frequencies
L1-L5	domestic (49); gender-based (33); elimination (7); activism (6); sexual (6); sexual (5); sexual (3); fight (3); women (2); victims (1)
R1-R5	against (32); women (32); support (9); unit (9); dovvsu [domestic violence and victim support unit] (8); victim (6); secretariat (4); abuse (3); victim (3); Ghana (2); abusing (1)

Table 1. The most salient collocates of VIOLENCE indicating GBV

The collocates in Table 1 (and the patterns in Figure 1) demonstrate that Ghanaian members of parliament (MPs) admit that there is gender-based violence (GBV) in Ghana. For example, as one MP notes, ‘there has been a lot of violence against women. It is on the increase. There is a police report which

states that there is an increase of 3.7 per cent of reported cases of rape and 12.4 per cent on defilement' (10 March 2015/Col.1482⁵). The collocates can be grouped into three thematic categories, namely:

- (1) forms of GBV (*e.g. domestic, sexual, abuse, abusing*);
- (2) victims of GBV (*e.g. women, victim(s)*); and
- (3) fight against GBV (*e.g. elimination, against, fight, support, activism, secretariat, dovusu, unit*).

These are discussed in turn below.

4.2 Forms of Gender-based Violence

In their discourse around GBV, Ghanaian MPs identify and discuss several forms of GBV. Figure 2 shows some of the forms of GBV, including, mainly, *violence against women* (lines 1-20), *violence against women in politics and leadership* (lines 7, 12), *sexual violence* (lines 8, 13), *maltreatment of alleged witches, wife-beating, abusing women* (line 10) (see examples 1-3 below for further discussion). In what follows, we discuss some individual examples as illustrations for our analytic conclusions and comparison with non-Ghanaian documents.

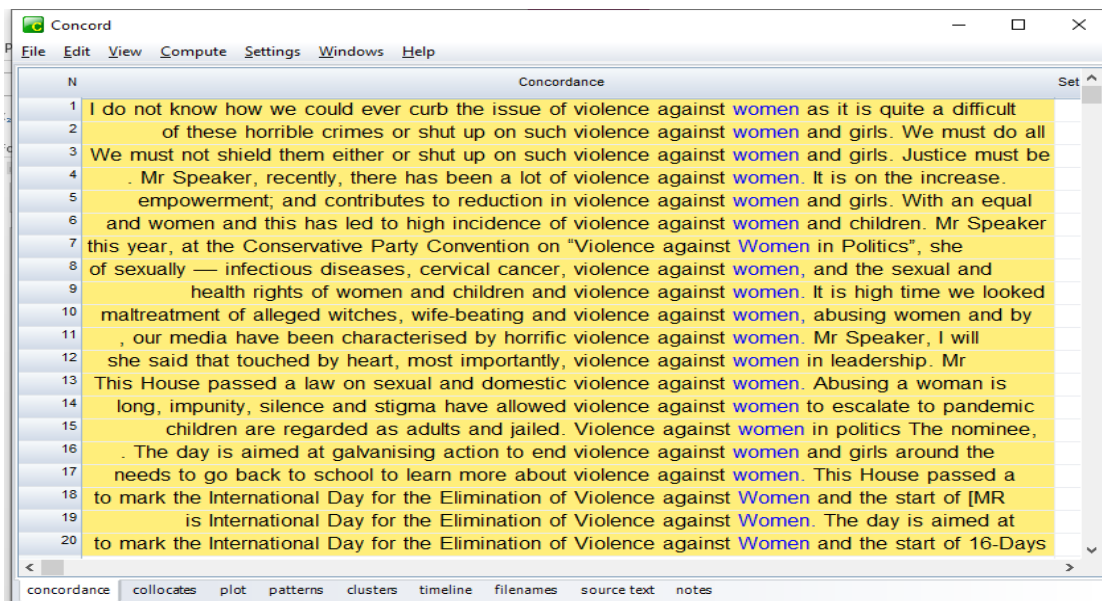


Figure 2. First 20 concordance lines of *violence against women*

Contributing to a debate on the elimination of violence against women during the celebration of the 2018 International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, Ms Angela Alorwu-Tay (MP for Afadzato South) mentioned several forms of GBV, including defilement, rape, physical assault, domestic violence, child marriage (see Example 1). The MP decried the incidence of abuse of school girls and ladies by teachers and lecturers in basic, senior high schools and universities, abuse of women in churches and work places as well as fathers abusing their daughters and gang rape.

Example 1: (11 Dec 2018/Col.4063)

For far too long, impunity, silence and stigma have allowed violence against women to escalate to pandemic proportions [and] [a]s of today, one in three women worldwide experiences gender-based violence. Issues of defilement, rape, physical assault, domestic violence, child marriage, among others all constitute violence against women and girls.

Example 2: (8 March 2019/Col.2185)

Mr Speaker, paragraph four, line three of the Statement made by the Hon Adwoa Safo addresses gender based violence. Paragraph eight, line two, also presents us with the opportunity to fight gender based violence. Mr Speaker, domestic violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, physical violence and any form of violence should be condemned.

Example 3: (8 March 2018/Col.2142)

Mr Speaker, girls are not in school, the defilement of girls and boys is ongoing, rape, teachers impregnating girls, teenage pregnancy, child prostitution, child marriage, burning and maltreatment of alleged witches, wife-beating and violence against women, abusing women and by exposing rape victims on social media.

In Example 2, Mrs Comfort Doyoe Cudjoe Ghansah (MP for Ada) also mentions domestic violence, sexual violence, emotional violence and physical violence as examples of GBV. Example 3 shows what Ms Otiko Djaba, the then Minister for the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP), identified as GBV. The types of GBV identified by the MPs, as in Examples 2 and 3, are similar to those listed by the Istanbul Convention, namely, ‘domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, forced marriage, crimes committed in the name of so-called “honour” and genital mutilation’ (Council of Europe, 2011, p. 2). The similarities suggest the universal nature of the types of GBV. Examples 1-3 indicate the extent to which GBV affects women and girls: it has escalated to pandemic levels, without any proper fight against it (Example 1). The Council of Europe (2011, p. 2) shares similar sentiments, describing GBV as a ‘grave concern’ and constituting ‘a serious violation of the human rights of women and girls’.

Even though domestic violence (DV) is one dimension of GBV (Iyanda et al., 2019), our observation is that MPs sometimes appear to equate GBV with DV, which has been ‘defined as an abuse (psychological/emotional, physical, sexual, and financial) between family members irrespective of sex’ (Osei-Tutu, 2017, p. 197). In example 4, the three instances of the coordination of *Domestic and Gender-Based Violence* (see italics) blurs the relationship between GBV and DV, presenting them as complements, congruent or two equal parts with similar forms and implications.

Example 4: (13 Nov 2019/Col.1015-1016)

Mr. Speaker, as part of efforts to ensure that victims of *Domestic and Gender-Based Violence* get prompt redress to their complaints, the Ministry operationalized the *Domestic/Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DV/SGBV)* Rapid Response Centres at Agbogbloshie and Madina Markets. In 2020, the Ministry will organise sensitization programmes on emerging issues on *Domestic/Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*.

In example 5, the MP sees household discrimination, commercial sexual exploitation and sexual and gender-based violence as being different forms of violence, even though gender-based violence encompasses the other forms of violence mentioned, i.e. *household discrimination, commercial sexual exploitation and sexual violence*.

Example 5: 28 May 2019/Col.53

It is critical to support the scale up of community-based programmes ... to address high risks associated with *household discrimination, commercial sexual exploitation and sexual and gender-based violence* (SGBV)...

The blurring of the differences between GBV and DV seems to suggest that GBV and DV constitute similar offences. This reflects in the definition of domestic violence in the Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (Act 732). The Act defines domestic violence as: (1) acts and threats that are likely to result in physical abuse, sexual abuse, economic abuse, emotional, verbal or psychological abuse⁶; (2) harassment, including sexual harassment and intimidation by inducing fear in another person; and (3) other harmful behaviours or conducts⁷. The Act further defines domestic relationship as a family relationship, a relationship akin to a family relationship or a relationship in a domestic situation that exists or has existed between a complainant and a respondent. The main difference between GBV and DV, thus, depends on the nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. In other words, the academic definitions of GBV (cf. Dickson et al., 2020; Heise, et al., 2002; Klugman, 2017; Osei-Tutu, 2017) and the Ghanaian legislative definition of DV largely encompass similar offences, even though DV is largely an interpersonal offence (Iyanda et al., 2019). In this sense, a Ghanaian MPs' mentioning of GBV and DV largely includes the same or similar offences and/or assumptions. To this end, the Ghanaian legislature may need to re-examine the law on DV and extend it beyond domestic violence; for example, how does the law handle GBV that does not occur in a domestic context? While there could be other laws that criminalise all forms of violence and abuse, they do not consider such violence and abuse in the context of gender, which may neglect crucial issues of gender. This is all the more reason why the government of Ghana may have to pay attention to the coalition of advocacy groups asking the government of Ghana to 'create sexual harassment policies in schools and workplaces in Ghana' (The Pearl Safe Haven, 2020).

MPs have also drawn attention to violence against women in politics and leadership positions (see Figure 2, lines 7, 12). Violence against women in politics has officially been recognised as a form of GBV (Dr Zanetor Agyeman-Rawlings, MP, Klottey-Korle; 11 Dec. 2018/Col.4083-4086). In a report of the Appointments Committee of Parliament, the Chairman of the Committee and MP for Bekwai, Joe Osei-Owusu, cited the then Minister-designate for the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Ms Cynthia Morrison (MP for Agona West), to have said that at a Conservative Party (UK) convention on 'Violence against Women in Politics' (VAWP), it was noted that:

Example 6: (1 Nov. 2018/Col.284)

... more often than not, women in politics are labelled as prostitutes or seen in the light of having granted sexual favors to enable them [to] attain such

positions and underscored the need for women in politics to unite to fight against the violence women encounter in politics.

Mrs Laadi Ayamba (MP for Pusiga) reiterates that ‘most women are not able to attain leadership positions and into good offices because they are asked to, more or less, sell themselves before they could get such positions’ (11 Dec 2018/Col.4075). As noted by Ms Adwoa Safo (MP for Dome-Kwabinya), Ghana’s political landscape is still unfavourable, rough and a huge deterrent to many women and young girls. What is noted here by Ms Morrison, Mrs Ayamba and Ms Safo has been reported in other jurisdictions such as Italy (Formato, 2014, 2017), the United Kingdom (Cameron & Shaw, 2016, 2020) and other contexts where women in politics are generally seen as undesirable (Bengochea, 2011).

Since VAWP is a global problem, country-specific conceptualisations of and the fight against it in a premier democracy like Ghana are crucial. For example, within the Fourth Republic of Ghana, i.e., 1992 through 2020, which covers seven parliaments, the percentage representation of women has ranged between 6% and 13% as against men’s range of 86% and 93% (Sarfo-Kantankah, 2021). Women’s political participation is said to have increased in recent times (Krook, 2017), yet VAWP has the potential to limit and curtail women’s electoral participation (Biroli, 2018) and prevent them from realising their political rights (Ballington, 2018). VAWP reinforces prevailing gender norms that pose a threat to democracy in general and the global advances made in incorporating women as full political actors in particular (Krook, 2017). Having assumed global trends (Krook, 2018) and being pervasive in sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana (Aga, 2017), VAWP has been recognised as a significant barrier to women’s political participation as a result of troubling rise in reports of assault, intimidation, and abuse directed at female politicians (Krook & Sanín, 2020). In 2011, the United Nations General Assembly declared zero tolerance for VAWP (Krook, 2018). Thus, when Ghanaian MPs raise the issue of VAWP in their discourses, they are giving practical meaning to the need to fight against VAWP.

5. Discussion

In this section, we interpret the data in view of the larger picture of GBV in Ghana and beyond. Two main thematic issues are discussed, namely: victims and perpetrators of GBV and the fight against it.

5.1 Victims and Perpetrators of Gender-based Violence: Women/Men

The victims of GBV are mainly women and not men, wives and not husbands, and children, especially female children, while men are, albeit indirectly, presumed to be the perpetrators. The collocates of GBV, as provided in Figure 1, show that *women* occurred 34 times, but the word *men/man* did not occur at all. Figure 2 illustrates the first 20 instances of the expression of *violence against women* (and *girls*, see lines 2, 3, 5, 16; *children*, line 6). The assumption here is that when MPs are talking about GBV/DV, they are a-priori referring to violence against women, girls and

children. The MPs are silent on violence against men. The fact that men are completely absent from these political texts can be seen as a way to blur agency. Male partners are reportedly responsible for most cases of heterosexual GBV and DV (Jones, 2018; Stöckl et al., 2013; UNFPA, 2020; World Health Organization, 2013).

The foregoing reflects that the definitions of GBV/DV seem to largely exclude men as victims. As noted by Lombard (2013, p. 177; see also Stöckl et al., 2013, p. 863; World Health Organization, 2013), the gender literature ‘positions violence within a gendered model of understanding that illustrates why women are predominantly “victims” and men perpetrators’. This is also supported by the Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Jones, 2018). Similarly, MPs’ discourses assume that GBV/DV is perpetrated only by men against women, without talking about the reasons why. However, while it is thought that DV against men is rare (Dienye & Gbeneol, 2009), research indicates that ‘men and women act violently in relationships at about the same rate’ (Kumar, 2012, p. 291). This is not to discount the fact that men engage in intimate partner killing more than women do (see Stöckl et al., 2013; World Health Organization, 2013). In most African societies, especially Ghana, men are supposed to be emotionally and psychologically strong and endure pain (cf. Diabah, 2019), such that men risk being mocked if they report DV against them by their female partners. Thus, the idea that men do not get abused in GBV and DV emanates from men’s inability to report abuse. Women are more likely than men to report abuse, even though in recent times men have also reported violence against them by their female partners in different parts of the world, including India and Ghana (ABC News, 2019; Emmanuel, 2015; Kumar, 2012). Of course, it must be mentioned that there are women who also refuse to report violence against them by, especially, their married partners as a result of stigma and fear of losing their marriages. Thus, reports of abuse by both male and female partners may not represent the actual numbers of abuse.

It must be noted that the discussion here of GBV/DV against men is not to downplay GBV/DV against women. There is no doubt that GBV/DV is mostly perpetrated by men against women (Ghana Statistical Services, 2016; Owusu-Addo et al., 2018). Research shows, for example, that globally the number of women killed by their partners is six times more than the number of men killed by their female partners, i.e., 38.6% as against 6.3% (Stöckl et al., 2013; World Health Organization, 2013). A 2008 Ghanaian Domestic and Health Survey and recent figures about GBV/DV reported in Ghana provide similar figures (Ajayi & Soyinka-Airewele, 2018). According to the UNFPA (2020), on average 35% of Ghanaian women have experienced some form of physical, emotional, psychological or sexual violence in the form of intimate partner violence. We mention the issue of men for the reason that GBV/DV against men appears to be absent from the parliamentary discourse on GBV/DV, even though there is evidence that Ghanaian men also experience GBV.

The Ghana Statistical Service, Ghana Health Service and ICF Macro (2009, p. 22) reported that while ‘38.7 per cent of ever-married women between the ages of 15 and 49 years reported having experienced physical, psychological or sexual violence’ by their husbands or partners at some point in their lives, about 27.6 per cent of Ghanaian men had also suffered physical or psychological violence by their wives or partners. In 2015, the Domestic

Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service reported that 518 men had reported being abused by their partners (Emmanuel, 2015). The question, then, is if men are now able to report DV against them, why are they not recognized in parliamentary legislative discourses? The discourses of MPs suggest that men are being discriminated against by lawmakers. In a study of DV against men in Ghana, Benewaa (2020, p. ix) finds that domestic 'violence against men [was] more emotional and psychological and included denial of sex, disrespect (including denying husband food, refusing to undertake domestic chores), insults and cheating'. All these forms are catered for by the Domestic Violence Law, 2007 (Act 732). But because they are mostly emotional and psychological issues, they are hardly directly observable, unlike the physical abuse often perpetrated by men against women. Being emotional and psychological, providing evidence against a partner may be difficult, which is probably why men find it difficult to report GBV/DV against them. For example, Benewaa (2020) notes that men report domestic abuse only at a point in their abuse when they are afraid of getting physical and assaulting their wives, knowing the consequences of the DV law. It means men endure a lot of abuse in their relationships. This calls for more support for men who suffer GBV/DV. In recent times, men have been urged to report their abusive wives to the DOVVSU for their intervention (Ghana News Agency, 2020).

Women are said to abuse their partners as a result of infidelity on the part of men, effects of socialisation and failed expectations, educational and financial status of men (Benewaa, 2020). On the other hand, men's abuse of their partners often emanates from cultural norms such as the male-centred way of life, the payment of bride price, which commodifies women, such that men see their partners as their property and therefore they should have free access to sex without question (Dery & Diedong, 2014; Frost & Dodoo, 2010; Ofei-Aboagye, 1994).

5.2 Fight Against Gender-based Violence

To mark the 2019 International Women's Day celebration, the Deputy Majority Leader and MP for Dome-Kwabenya, Ms Adwoa Safo, stated in Parliament that addressing GBV and empowering women was economically critical (8 March 2019/Col. 2161). She noted that innovations in information and communication technology (ICT) had revolutionised the way for women to report domestic abuses and reduce the incidence of domestic abuse. She further noted that ICT had presented them the opportunity to fight GBV. She suggested increased investments in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education and encouraged girls to enter into the sciences. Several other ways to fight against GBV and DV have been proposed by MPs in their parliamentary discourses.

MPs see collective activism and the push for the implementation and application of laws against GBV, such as the Domestic Violence Law, which criminalises harmful cultural practices, as having great potential for fighting GBV/DV. For example, in a statement on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the start of 16-Days Activism against Gender-Based Violence, Ms Alorwu-Tay (MP for Afadzato South) stated that all Ghanaians had 'a responsibility to ensure that women are not beaten up by their husbands, bosses and others', saying '[w]omen who face

such abuses silently at home should be bold to take on their spouses according to the dictates of the law' (11 Dec 2018/Col.4063-4066). Mrs Laadi Ayamba (MP for Pusiga) thinks that the law enforcement agencies such as the Ghana Police Service and other security services should help to bring all offenders to book and punish them appropriately. MPs believe that if offenders are seriously punished, it will deter them from committing GBV (see example 7). On the issue of the law, Ms Alorwu-Tay averred:

Example 7: (11 Dec. 2018/Col.4063-4066)

I believe it is time the security agencies, particularly, the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service, took the lead role in helping to stop this and work with the Judiciary to ensure that those who engage in such evil acts get the most severe of punishments to serve as deterrent to others.

She further urges the government of Ghana to adequately resource state institutions like the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection as well as the Police so that they can work effectively to keep women safe, calling on the President to make the protection of women a personal agenda and support women. She advises victims of GBV against settling GBV at home, and encourages them to report perpetrators to the appropriate state institutions and bring them before the courts for appropriate sanctions to be applied. The media are also advised to take reportage on GBV seriously to stem the tide of GBV in Ghana.

The MPs' call for activism against GBV may be inherent in the successes that activism has achieved in the fight against GBV in Ghana. Ampofo (2008) and Iyanda et al. (2019) have noted that the vibrancy of gender-based activism has helped in the passage of legislation and the fight against GBV in Ghana. Ampofo (2008) notes how, for example, the National Coalition on Domestic Violence Legislation, which was established in 2003, either worked closely with, and sometimes independently of, or even in conflict with, the state to specifically push for the passage of the legislation. Iyanda et al. (2019, p. 13) attribute Ghana's low rate of GBV/DV, as compared to other African countries such as Nigeria and Zambia, 'to the growing (women) movements and relentless effort toward instituting full laws against DV'. Activist activities for a comprehensive implementation of GBV/DV legislation is still ongoing in Ghana (cf. The Pearl Safe Haven, 2020). As the Majority Leader, Mr Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu notes, Parliament should 'use the occasion of the International Women's Day to condemn gender-based violence and commit to work with partner organisations to protect women through legislation, scrutiny and oversight' (10 March 2020/Col.054).

Since GBV is deep-rooted in gender inequality (Iyanda et al., 2019), MPs cite the fight for gender parity as one of the key ways to eliminate GBV. These include gender mainstreaming in all government processes (Ms Otiko Djaba, Minister for MoGCSP, 8 March 2018/Col.2142) and presenting and insisting on gender-friendly budget, which should be at the centre of the developing agenda of the country (Mr Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu, 10 March 2020/Col.054). The fight for gender parity has been a long-standing issue around the world, especially since the United Nations' declaration of 1975 through 1985 as the decade of women and the Beijing Conference in 1995 (cf. Manuh & Anyidoho, 2015). The advocacy for gender equality/equity has been part of Ghana's

struggle for political maturity, with calls for women's empowerment through increased political participation. Thus, MPs' call for gender parity is a reinforcement of the long-standing agenda.

Finally, MPs believe that the education of and awareness creation for the people of Ghana has the potential to help eliminate GBV. MPs think that organising community-based dialogues and sensitisation activities can help end GBV. As one MP admonishes colleague MPs:

Example 8: (11 Dec 2018/Col.4067-4070)

I plead with Hon Members of Parliament that they should help educate our people in the various constituencies that there should not be gender-based violence. When we go out to campaign, we should make this a part of our agenda to help Ghana achieve Goal 5 of the SDGs.

Because GBV is a human rights issue (Ballington, 2018), educating people about GBV also implies making them aware of their rights, including their right to life, freedom from torture and inhuman and degrading treatment, right to liberty and security and the right to report and seek justice for offences against them. Such knowledge on the part of victims of GBV is critical for the elimination of GBV. Also, referring to the United Nations' sustainable development goal (SDG) 5 is significant: the MP draws attention to the fact that fighting GBV is a global agenda. SDG 5 aims at ensuring gender equity by 2030. The targets of SDG 5 include elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls, elimination of all harmful practices such as child and forced marriages, and ensuring women's full and effective participation in leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life⁸.

The analysis of the fight against GBV in parliamentary debates underscores the role of individuals, the state, social movements, the media and supra-national bodies in the fight against GBV (cf. Corradi & Stöckl, 2016).

6. Conclusion

This study has sought to explore the discursive construction of gender-based violence (GBV) in parliamentary debates in Ghana, a prominent parliamentary democracy in West Africa. The results indicate that Ghanaian parliamentarians discursively construct GBV in terms of the forms of GBV, victims and perpetrators of GBV, and the fight against it. The identified forms of GBV include domestic violence, wife beating, sexual violence, defilement, rape, physical assault, teenage pregnancy, child prostitution, child marriage and violence against women in politics. The MPs often equate GBV with domestic violence (DV). The MPs seem to recognise GBV only in terms of violence against females, while considering women as victims of GBV and men as perpetrators, yet research indicates that men also suffer from GBV and DV (cf. Benewaa, 2020). In other words, the MPs appear silent on violence against men. In terms of the fight against GBV, the MPs think that collective activism, education, achieving gender parity and a strong legal regime that severely punishes offenders are critical antidotes to GBV. The study underlines the role of individuals, the state, legislation, social movements, the media and supra-national bodies in the fight against GBV and highlights

cultural gender issues between the roles of male and female citizens. Specifically, the study underscores the need for the Parliament of Ghana to consider passing an all-encompassing legislation on GBV that covers both GBV in domestic and non-domestic contexts, since the existing domestic violence law appears to be limited in scope. This is important because MPs often seem to equate GBV with DV.

The study draws attention to the broader issues and global understandings of gender and/or GBV. MPs' discursive construction of GBV reflects what has been noted to be gender (cf. Diabah, 2019; Lombard, 2013). Globally, either within academic or policy-making circles, gender has been constructed as referring to issues affecting women (albeit because gender-based injustices mostly affect women) (Sarfo-Kantankah, 2021), excluding the fact that men also suffer from gender-based injustices. If '[g]ender is constructed discursively through language and performances and institutionally through people's positioning of their own identities in relation to social and cultural structures' (Lombard, 2013, p.179), then one can say that MPs' attitudes and positioning towards gender are practically, albeit indirectly, biased against men as the default perpetrator. This means that the implementation of the laws against GBV is more likely to ignore, or under-recognise, abuse against men. Therefore, instead of constructing the discourse around GBV 'within a gendered model of understanding that illustrates why women are predominantly "victims" and men perpetrators' (Lombard, 2013, p. 177), we should begin to reconstruct GBV as something that affects both men and women. Such a reconstruction calls for gender parity, since GBV is said to be deep-rooted in gender inequality (Iyanda et al., 2019). It appears that GBV almost by default is used to refer to violence against women because of the general belief that women suffer from gender inequalities, with men having more economic, social, cultural and symbolic power (cf. Baum et al., 2021) and, therefore, there must be a systematic and concerted effort to fight for women's rights and gender equality/equity (cf. Manuh & Anyidoho, 2015). We believe that the fight for gender equality and equity will, in a way, draw awareness to the need to pay attention to abuse and violence against women and men. Another way is to profile the different forms of abuse that affect either or both genders so that responses to GBV can be tailored appropriately to address violence affecting women and men, since, as noted by Benewaa (2020), men mainly suffer from emotional and psychological abuse as against physical abuse of women. Such a position will not only bring about behavioural change, but also draw attention to the fact that there are aspects of culture, such as masculinity (cf. Diabah, 2019), that affect men negatively. The literature on masculinity appears to suggest that masculinity in relation to gender stereotyping and domestic relationships predominantly concerns men acting against women, making us overlook the violence and abuse of men by women.

Finally, the study highlights corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis as an effective approach for identifying hidden meanings such as revealing inequality through/in discourse. It has been clear in this study that, but for the use of corpus methodological approaches, details of MPs' discursive construction of GBV could not have been (easily) identified. The corpus-assisted approach, using concordances and collocations to identify key words and their collocations, has provided details of how GBV is constructed in Ghana's parliamentary debates concerning social problems.

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Notes

1. An initial version of this study was presented at the International Interdisciplinary Violence Conference virtually held April 15-16, 2021 in Ankara, Turkey.
2. See <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>
3. See [https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/-/media/files/un%20women/vaw/full%20text/africa/ghana%20-%20domestic%20violence%20act%20\(2007\).pdf?vs=5925](https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/-/media/files/un%20women/vaw/full%20text/africa/ghana%20-%20domestic%20violence%20act%20(2007).pdf?vs=5925)
4. The data were first used for a study, Sarfo-Kantankah (2021) *The Discursive Construction of men and women in Ghanaian Parliamentary Discourse: A corpus-based study*, *Ampersand*, 8, 100079, which was sponsored by the Directorate of Research, Innovation and Consultancy (DRIC) of the University of Cape Coast, grant reference RSG/INDI/CHLS/2020/111.
5. Shows the date of the debate and the column of the Hansard where the statement can be found.
6. *Physical abuse* includes physical assault or use of physical force against another person including the forcible confinement or detention of another person and the deprivation of another person of access to adequate food, water, clothing, shelter, rest, or subjecting another person to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; *Sexual abuse* includes the forceful engagement of another person in a sexual contact which includes sexual conduct that abuses, humiliates or degrades the other person or otherwise violates another person's sexual integrity or a sexual contact by a person aware of being infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or any other sexually transmitted disease with another person without that other person being given prior information of the infection; *Economic abuse* includes the deprivation or threatened deprivation of economic or financial resources which a person is entitled to by law, the disposition or threatened disposition of moveable or immovable property in which another person has a material interest and hiding or hindering the use of property or damaging or destroying property in which another person has a material interest; *Emotional, verbal or psychological abuse include* any conduct that makes another person feel constantly unhappy, miserable, humiliated, ridiculed, afraid, jittery or depressed or to feel inadequate or worthless.
7. That in any way (i) harms or may harm another person, (ii) endangers the safety, health or well-being of another person, (iii) undermines another person's privacy, integrity or security, or (iv) detracts or is likely to detract from another person's dignity and worth as a human being.
8. See United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030-goal5.html>

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